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SUBJECT: ROMA AT RISK: VICIOUS RHETORIC; VICIOUS CIRCLES

11. (SBU) Summary: A new study by the highly-respected think tank Political Capital concludes that intolerance is increasing in Hungary as long-standing prejudices are compounded by growing political frustration and economic uncertainty. The result has been an increase in extremist rhetoric and in violent incidents, with the Roma community as the principal target of both. End Summary.

THE HATE THAT DARE SPEAK ITS NAME

12. (SBU) The study concludes that:

- Parallel to the more visible manifestations of intolerance ranging from public demonstrations to fatal attacks, the public discourse has been increasingly "held hostage" by extremists. As observed by numerous Embassy contacts, the study concludes that the Hungarian public has grown inured to the use of overtly intolerant expressions in the media.

- The Roma community is most at risk. As a recent Gallup survey shows, anti-Roma sentiment has increased dramatically to 39 percent - and is higher still among rural residents. (By contract, Gallup's findings indicate that 13 percent of respondents expressed anti-Semitic sentiments; a significant percentage also expressed anti-immigrant feelings "despite the almost complete absence of immigration.") Though this is lower than findings in other countries in the region, a separate study suggests that 75 percent of Hungarian respondents believe that Roma receive "too much" state support but "do not abide by the law."

- Successive governments have failed to solve the Roma community's problems. Factors including multigenerational unemployment, high drop-out and decreasing literacy rates, and minimal access to health care have left the Roma community in a vicious circle of poverty. The study notes that the absence of effective self-government, the weakness of civil society, and the long-standing divisions between Roma leaders have prevented effective advocacy efforts.

- Extremist elements have succeeded in capitalizing on the issue. Preying on latent prejudice at a time of heightened public concern regarding the economy, they have continually characterized the Roma community as "parasites." Exploiting several unrelated incidents over the course of the past years, organizations such as the Magyar Garda have also appointed themselves "protectors of the majority" at risk due to "Gypsy crime." According to Political Scientist Zoltan Kiszely, this approach has been particularly effective in winning support from rural non-Roma who live near Roma communities.

HONESTY AND HYPERBOLE

13. (C) We broadly concur with Political Capital's findings. So, too, do many of our contacts. Economic analyst Krisztian Orban, for example, describes Roma communities as "concentrated pockets of misery" where unemployment "can

exceed 90 percent." Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Erika Szucs, who is the government's lead on promoting the controversial transition from welfare to work, admits that even decades of assistance have had little impact on Roma living under "feudal conditions." President Solyom has stated publicly that the time has come to reevaluate Hungary's Law on Minority Self-government.

14. (C) But there is a fine line between honesty and hyperbole. Recent comments decrying the "breakdown in social order" and calling for the mobilization of all retired police officers will do little to put the issue in perspective for the public.

15. (C) There are also self-inflicted wounds to treat. Prominent Roma politicians, including Budapest Self-government President Orban Kolompar, make headlines for charges of malfeasance, reinforcing public stereotypes. Others add fuel to the fire by talking of a "Roma Garda" to counter the far-right Magyar Garda. These statements have opened the door for charges from right-wing JOBBIK party leader Gabor Vona that "the Roma leadership is the real enemy."

#### NEW ANGLES OF APPROACH

16. (SBU) Comment: Political Capital's recommendations range from an enhanced law enforcement presence in Roma communities to increased engagement with all Hungarians - especially students - to promote tolerance. We are already hard at work along these lines, sponsoring a newly-formed Roma Law Enforcement Officers' Association, rolling out a tolerance

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campaign with the schools across Hungary, and cooperating with the Prime Ministry, political parties, and other embassies to increase public awareness. Although the Prime Minister's National Security Advisor believes "there is a political consensus against intolerance," senior officials admit privately that intolerance is a question Hungary has never fully solved even at times of relative political consensus and relative economic prosperity. There are serious questions as to whether Hungary can reverse the trend at a time of weak leadership, political infighting and economic uncertainty. End Comment.

Foley